

"The Christian Maiden Falling Asleep in Jesus."

A S E R M O N ,

PREACHED IN MEMORY OF

MISS MARY WEST SMITH,

IN

Calvary Church, Memphis, ✓

BY

DAVID C. PAGE, D. D.,


LATE RECTOR.

Night dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary worn-out winds expire more soft.

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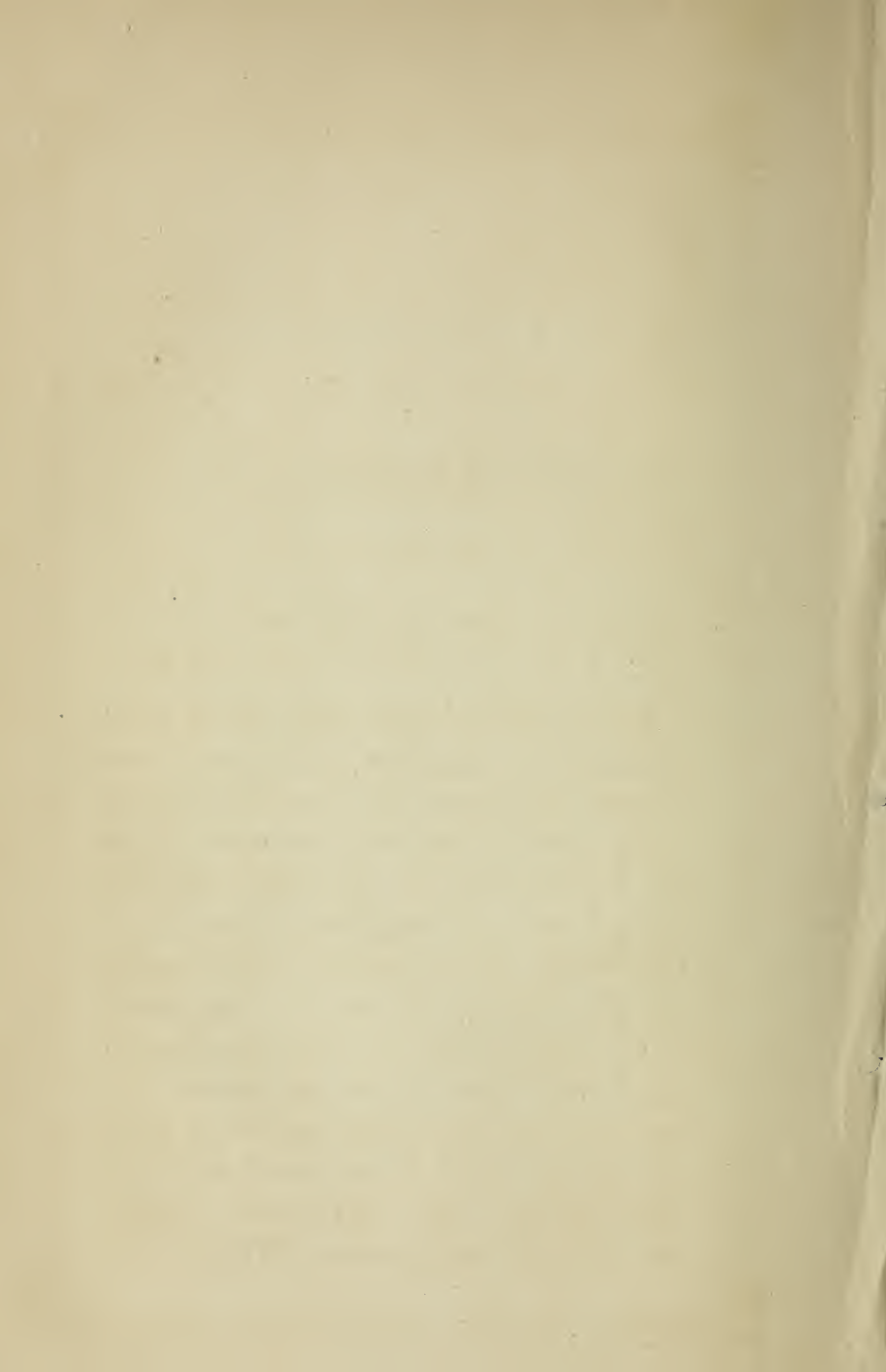
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THE following Sermon was delivered in the autumn of '52, and was published at the time in one of the Periodicals of the Church. Its typography, however, was so inaccurately and unsatisfactorily executed, that the author determined to avail himself of the first favorable opportunity to present it to the public in a more readable and acceptable shape; and he therefore now commits it to the press, in the belief that in so doing, he will be performing a not ungrateful service to the surviving relatives of the deceased; and, at the same time, calling the attention of the community to an interesting psychological phenomenon, and to a most beautiful illustration of the power of our blessed faith to sustain, in their last periods, those even to whose young and fervid imaginations the world is all brightness and beauty.

New-York, April 3d, 1858.

Revised 22 Apr 46 Putnam



SERMON.

“OUR FRIEND LAZARUS SLEEPETH.”

Gospel of St. John, c. xi, v. 11.

THE occasion on which these words were uttered, is best explained by the simple and beautiful language of the preceding context. “Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore *his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had*

heard, therefore, that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that, saith he to his disciples, let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto him: Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, are there not twelve hours in the day? if any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; but if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things, said he; and after that he saith, our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."

I. The first remark which I would make upon these beautiful words is, that there is nothing in the genius of Christianity which at all militates against the cultivation of *particular and private friendship*; and I make this remark, because it has been objected to Christianity—that it is unfavorable to the cultivation of these peculiar and personal regards to which the term friendship has come to be appro-

priated, inasmuch as, though it inculcates *general benevolence* and *universal philanthropy*, yet it lays no stress upon friendship *in its specific and distinctive character*. But it should be considered that particular and private friendship is not like justice and charity—a duty of *imperative and universal obligation*. All men are not capable of the delicacy of such a sentiment; and those who are capable of it, may be deprived, by uncontrollable circumstances, of its peculiar advantage and pleasures; and it is just in proportion as we cultivate the benevolent and unselfish temper to which Christianity would form us, that we become really susceptible of a sentiment so exalted and pure.

But the example ~~our~~ Lord seems to show us, that there is nothing in the spirit of his religion which is at variance with the sentiment of friendship; for St. John is called, you know, “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” He is said to have leaned upon his breast when at supper, and to have received from him whatever are the marks of a *peculiar*

confidence and affection. In the text he speaks of Lazarus under the endearing epithet of "our friend;" and the evangelist beautifully says, as we have just seen, "*Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus,*" and described him as being wont to seek in the village mansion of those loved and cherished friends, an asylum from the toils and solitudes of his ordinary ministrations.

And what a beautiful example of the tenderest and most generous friendship have we not, in his intercourse with his disciples! How kind and affectionate and familiar was his converse with them! How forgetful, was he not, of himself, and how deep and touching a concern did he not manifest for *them*! "*Ye now have sorrow,*" said he to them upon the eve of his passion—" *Ye now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.*" And even as he was suspended upon the cross, when he saw his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith to his mother, "*Woman, behold thy son.* Then saith he to the disciple, *Be-*

hold thy mother; and from that time that disciple took her to his own home."

We have a beautiful exemplification, let me add, of the truest friendship, in the case of those primitive believers, of whom it is said that they were of "*one heart and of one soul.*" And it is plain from these considerations, therefore, that so far is it from being true that Christianity lays no stress upon the sentiment of friendship, that the very converse is the fact; and were Christians more thoroughly imbued with the spirit of their religion, they could not *but* be bound together by the ties of an intimate, and self-sacrificing, and all-enduring friendship.

II. The next reflection suggested by the passage before us is, that *the death of the righteous is wont to be represented in Holy Scriptures as a sleep—a soft and gentle slumber.* This beautiful form of speech occurs frequently in the New Testament, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," says our Saviour. Speaking of the first martyr, St. Stephen, it is said, that "*he fell asleep;*" and says St. Paul the apostle, "*I would not have you ignorant, breth-*

ren, concerning them that are asleep ; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." In sleep our bodies are inert and motionless, our senses steeped in oblivion, and we are utterly unconscious of what is passing around us, and, therefore, death is often represented by the ancients under the similitude of sleep ; but it is remarkable, that wherever this figure is employed outside the sacred records, it is invested with associations which make an uncertain and ineffectual response to the soul's yearnings after immortality. The philosophers *speculated*, indeed, upon the immortality of man ; and we may imagine one of them to have reasoned about it in this wise : "The horrid sentiment, that man is but a higher species of organized existence, is refuted by every operation of my mind, and by every instinct of my heart ; for can it be that man, whom the gods have endowed with such noble capacities, and powers, and affections—man, who, while the materialism that surrounds him is wholly inert and mindless, is a thinking, active, and in some sense, all-pervading intelli-

gence;—man, who alone of all the animal tribes, is capable of reflecting on the various objects which address themselves to his senses,—of analysing, combining, and arranging his thoughts and emotions,—of exploring the wonders of the earth and of the heavens,—of retiring into the abysses of the past, and of penetrating the labyrinths of the future;—man, for whom such magnificent arrangements have been made in nature and society, and who, with all the intensity of his sentimental heart, pants after a brighter, nobler, happier, endless life;—can it be that he is to flutter through his little span of being, and then to sink down into the gulf of a lifeless and a hopeless nothingness?” And yet, reason as they might upon this subject, brethren, the profoundest sages of antiquity viewed the immortality of the soul as a consummation to be hoped for rather than a truth to be believed—as a problem to be solved, rather than a fact demonstrated and certain—as an enchanting vision of the imagination, rather than as a *glorious reality*, shedding light upon the understanding and imparting joy to the heart.

Not so the Evangel; for, as said our Heavenly Teacher, as he stood by the grave of him of Bethany, *our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep*; so the glorious hour is speeding towards us when all the dead in Christ shall awake to sleep no more—shall arise to a state of glory and of bliss which mortal eye hath not seen, nor mortal ear heard, nor mortal heart imagined. And even now can we discern the first radiance of that resurrection morning, *when the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first*. But the words before us are susceptible moreover of a *touching local application*. To us of the ministry, indeed, they have a richness and a depth of meaning which can be appreciated by those only, a part of whose sacred office it is to bury the dead in Christ. How many images throng around me of the departed saints once living in the several fields of labor, where, in the Providence of God, it

has been my appointment to minister! Now one rises to my view who was wont to welcome me to his hospitable mansion, not merely in obedience to a customary form of civility, but out of no common respect and reverence to the Institutions of Christ, and because he esteemed the pastors of his flock very highly in love for ~~his~~^{their} work's sake, and whom, though for many long years the wild flower has bloomed upon his grave, I love to cherish with a frequent and a grateful remembrance. What a halo of glory surrounded that old man's dying couch—how he went into the world unknown, leaning upon his beloved—staying himself upon the Lord, the Everlasting God—possessed of a peace which passeth all understanding, and sustained by that glorious Hope which is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. “*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright—for the end of that man is peace.*” This is one of the pictures which memory, not imagination, brings before me.

And then I go back in the long past to

the parting hour of another of Christ's blessed saints, and well remember what a lively interest she took in the Master's work ; the faithful friend, the affectionate sister, the intelligent and cheerful companion,—who, wherever she went, gave a zest to conversation, and diffused an innocent sprightliness over the domestic and social circle. And then I think of another and another, of whom, or of such as them, it has been so beautifully said : “The vision is loveliest at its vanishing away, and we perceive not, perhaps, till we see the parting wing, that an angel has been with us.”

And now I would bestow a few sweet memories upon another dear sister in Christ, that most interesting young maiden, with whom we were wont to take sweet counsel, and come up to this house of God in company ; for she too has fallen asleep in Jesus—her place before us is empty, and she lives in the blessed remembrance of those whom she has left behind her. And remember, brethren, that it is for no purpose of pompous and vain declamation that

I have selected this as the topic of to-day's discourse. I have chosen it because it will prove, I trust, eminently profitable and interesting to the younger members of Christ's flock among us.

There is a peculiarity about it, moreover, in a psychological point of view, which might afford matter for profitable and entertaining contemplation to the philosopher not less than to the Christian.

In a letter, which I recently received from a well-known citizen* of this place, the friend and guardian of our departed young sister, he said: "In death she was even more lovely than in life. All the blessings which Christ gives to those who trust in him, were given to her in overflowing fullness. Oh, how sweetly and triumphantly her spirit passed away!" And again he says: "It was not the fatigue of travel that did her harm. It was the intensity of her emotions at the novelty, sublimity, magnificence and beauty of the scenery and objects she witnessed and visited." I saw the effect, and did all that was in my power to restrain her; but

* Henry G. Smith, of the Memphis Bar.

I could not withhold her from Niagara, the St. Lawrence, Lake Champlain, and the ever-shifting magnificence, beauty, freshness and gentleness of the mountains, hills and valleys of New England. Her susceptibility to impressions of this kind was of wonderful quickness and intensity. Her emotions were constantly struggling, and overcoming her, for utterance—words failed her, and at length and often she would sink back in utter and sad despair, that she could not find any words to tell her emotions. She had always been dissatisfied, she told me, with the descriptions she had read in books of things sublime and beautiful, and wondered at the meagreness of the language of the writers, and ascribed it to the meagreness of their vocabulary; but that now she found no words within her command to describe such things, and to express the feelings they gave rise to in her bosom. The effort to find words was a fatigue and an affliction. Those which were common had become threadbare and disagreeable, and she avoided using them. One only remained

to her, and that she could not help using—
 ‘Beautiful, beautiful!’ One day she repeated
 me some lines, the phraseology and imagery
 of which have gone out of my memory; but
 the idea was that the beauty and the love-
 liness were so intense that they had become
 painful. *The chief elements of her soul*
were Love and Beauty. She loved every-
 body, and in everything there was beauty
 to her heart. No coarse feeling was in
 her, and it was hard for her to discover
 any such in anybody else. She loved her
 friends and the attendant clergymen, (‘Holy
 ministers of God,’ was her phrase when
 speaking of them,) and physicians, and every
 member of the family about her, and was
 thankful for each attentive act with a
 grace and affection perfectly celestial. The
 prayers and the hymns, and the Communion
 Service, and the voices of those who joined,
 were sweetly beautiful to her.

“But I cannot tell you of all these things:
 they cannot be told; the sweet words to
 all about her, and the affectionate messages
 to her absent friends and relatives, and

the radiant looks which from time to time illuminated her face, as a kind word or act, or a pleasant thought would occur to her. The window of the chamber where she lay opens to the West, and before it stretches out a landscape of exceeding beauty—the blue hills in the distance, and before and around a little vale of green fields and fruits, and a silver band of sparkling and rippling waters. Her eye resting upon it as she was lying in bed, the curtain being lifted from the window, she said: ‘O, beautiful, beautiful—here let me die!’ and, alas! in fourteen days from that time, in the same chamber, and with the same scene expanding before her in all its rich and gentle loveliness, the chill hand of Death fell upon her, and her eyes closed, never again to open upon the beautiful and lovely of earth.”

Speaking of a gallery of paintings to which he had taken her, my friend goes on to say: “Some of them are fine specimens of the art, many of them very interesting in their subject, and several of them of very

brilliant and impressive coloring. It was the first gallery of the kind she had ever seen. I observed when she went into the room, and her eye glanced round the wall, her very soul seemed swept away with an overwhelming flood of intense emotion. She could scarcely stand while I handed her a chair. I told her to keep seated—not to walk about—to notice those paintings only that were near and before her, and that we would again visit the place. I then left her for an hour or more. When I returned, she shewed she was much overcome. She had doubtless been unable to restrain herself. The excitement was too great. Her nervous system gave way before it. We took her back to my father's—she went to bed, and never again left it until the morning when carried from the chamber of death. Her bodily disease was of the nervous kind, which was aggravated—perhaps made fatal—by the intensity of her emotions of wonder and delight. I guarded much against it, endeavored much to withhold her, and did so to a great ex-

tent; but not enough, I fear, to prevent the fatal result. I may be wrong, perhaps I worshiped the child too blindly to be able to judge accurately; but I surely am of the opinion that she has fallen a victim *to a sensibility too intense and delicate to the beautiful, the lovely, and the magnificent. Her sense of beauty was a disease. It clothed all her thoughts in her sickness—covered everything she saw or heard that was kind and attentive, and its language was constantly flowing from her lips.* And surely the Communion Service, as administered to her by the Rev. Dr. Cox, as the dim twilight of evening was fading out of the West into the dark night, was holy, heavenly, beautiful, radiant of peace, happiness, and as was never religious office before, in all that I have seen. She seemed to have in her memory almost the whole service, the responses of which she repeated without the book; and her thin, silver voice mingling with the others present, seemed like the string of an angel's harp just tuned for the presence of God.

“O, I despair of being able to write soberly of these things. The soul of the dear child is in my heart; would to God it could forever stay there, and the hard earthly things never more obtain possession of it. She comprehended clearly the Communion Service, and accompanied it all through. When the minister handed her the cup, she clasped it with her hand and put it to her lips; and as he pronounced the words ‘and be thankful,’ she held his hand with the cup, and turned upon him her full and gleaming eyes, and said in a tone of most clear and fervent plaintiveness: ‘I am thankful.’ One hears words so spoken but once in his life, and that one time can never be forgotten. She never omitted her prayers at night, sick or well, at home or abroad, alone or in a crowd. I do not think she could have slept had she omitted them. In her sickness, and during the last hours, she loved to hear prayers and hymns, and passages of scripture, and would suggest those of most appropriate character. Mr. Cox asked her at

one time if she would like to hear him read a hymn. She replied in the affirmative. He asked her if there was any one she wished particularly to hear. She struggled a few moments to collect her memory, and seemed to be unable to recall the one she wanted; she said, 'I can't remember the first line—*but trials will befall*, or something like that.' The minister at once turned to the 183d hymn, and read it to her. When he read the lines,

But with humble faith to see,
Love inscribed upon them all.

'Yes,' she said, opening her full eyes, and looking up, 'Yes, Love inscribed upon them all!'

"But I must stop," adds my stricken friend. "A volume would scarce contain the thousand touching little incidents of her sickness. All was gentleness, and faith, and love. She had no petulance nor cross words—not one. She was full of thankfulness to all about her."

I have also received from the Rev. Mr. Benedict, one of the clergymen who at-

tended her in her last periods, a letter, in which he writes as follows: "I was not called to her till yesterday morning. It was thought she was dying. It required but little examination to find that religion had been with her a living principle, and was then her joy and support. She frankly owned her desire to live if it were consistent with God's will, but her desire and prayer was to be willing to die. Once, a fear of the cold, dark grave passed over, but it did not long continue to disturb her. As the Service of the Holy Communion began, she seemed to collect herself and followed it through, I think understanding every word. Her voice was clear and fervent in all the responses in the Confession, the Trisagion, and the Gloria in Excelsis. She breathed her last so gently and so quietly, that we hardly knew when the breath ceased. We were at the very moment, we think, commending her soul to the Sacred Trinity in the closing words of Bishop Andrew's Liturgy. Such a death as hers," he concludes, "such a death

as hers, leaves all her friends more of comfort than of sorrow; and though they cannot but be desolate for awhile, yet hers was such a clear, calm, joyous trust in Jesus, and such a lovely example of the Christian character, that they will learn, I trust, to bless God for His dealing with them, and submit to what is truly her great gain. The many interesting incidents of her sickness and death, all indicated one thing—her preparation for, and readiness for, her Lord's coming."

This affecting and beautiful scene, my brethren, is eminently suggestive of highly profitable and profoundly interesting thought. Let us dwell for a moment upon the reflections which it gives rise to. We may learn, then, from this most instructive and touching story, the inestimable *value of systematic and earnest instruction in the principles of the Gospel in the Church*. There are those here to-day who well remember, as one of the aboriginal members of this parish, the late Durant Hatch, and who will bear me witness when I say, that he was equally remark-

able for being an *honest man*, a polished gentleman, a sincere Christian, and an enlightened and decided Churchman. That most estimable person was the grandfather of the lamented young lady, whose premature departure has supplied me with the lesson of to-day; and when I say this, I say all that is necessary to explain the manner of her life and the manner of her death. In other words, the family of Durant Hatch was a type of many a family in our communion—whether in our Fatherland or in these United States of America; families, that is to say, who, instead of presenting the not unusual spectacle of a particolored and divided household, where some forward Miss or beardless Master is not slow to enter into a theological dispute with the mother that bore him, or with that venerable person, “the *old man* or the *Governor*”—as behind his back they call him—present to the world the symmetrical and beautiful aspect of a united and well-ordered, and compact, and Christian family. Such families, for example, are always to

be seen in their proper places in the parish Church, devoutly joining in the offices of our venerable ritual, with meek heart and due reverence, hearing and receiving God's Word, and who, though not unreasonably solicitous to press their creed upon those of different sentiments, nor hazarding the safety and the dignity of their own principle by exposing it to the unreasoning cavils and quaint railleries of men of heterodox minds; yet, in their adherence to the principles of the Bible, as attested by the Creeds and the Catechism, and the Articles, and the Homilies, and the Collects, and the Canticles, turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, but ever keep on in these good old trodden paths of the Apostles and Prophets, and exhibiting, in all their domestic and social relations and intercourses, the restraining, regulating, refining, elevating principles of the Gospel in the Church. Need I tell you, brethren, that there is a real respectability in such a household which must commend itself to every person of solid judgment and

of chastened feelings? and whenever any member of such a family is gathered to his fathers, we are prepared to hear that he died "*in the confidence of a certain faith, and in the comfort of a reasonable, religious and holy hope.*" Some of you, perhaps, may be able to appreciate the force of these observations, and some of you may not; but mark well my words, brethren: never in your lives have you listened to a saying, whether from the pulpit or elsewhere, which was more worthy of your profound consideration and good heed, as men, as citizens, and as intelligent and moral beings.

And now I would say to you, my younger brethren in especial, prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The Gospel's truth is attested by your consciences. You feel that you have erred and strayed from right ways. You feel that God is coming to judge the world in righteousness. You feel that it is they only who do his commandments, who have a right to the tree of life, and who enter in through the

gates into the City. Prepare, then, I say, prepare; be ready, be ready. "For have you not heard how such an one went to his bed a healthy and prosperous man, on whose countenance the shadow of death was dark in the morning? How the marriage feast was spread in such a house, and the young bride passed to her chamber, and knew not that the mirth of her friends would soon be changed into sorrow over her grave? Of such a neighbor who went forth to the gates of the City, and the crowd trod on him that he died? Of these men slain by robbers; of those swallowed up by the sea; of some that fell victims to the pestilence that walketh in darkness; and of others whom a fly, a grapestone, a flint in the path, a tile from the house top, took away in the morning of their lives, and the heat of their blood and their transgressions, without a day, an hour, a moment, for reflection or for prayer?"* Prepare, then, I say, prepare; *be ready, be ready.*

* Jeremy Taylor.

When Popilius, by order of the Roman Senate, required Antiochus to withdraw his army from the king of Egypt, and he desired time to deliberate about the matter, the Roman drew a circle with his wand about him, and said, "Give an answer before you move."* And thus, says an old writer, "Eternity, whose proper emblem is a circle, a figure without end, sets before us life and death, even that life or death which sooner or later awaits us all." Watch, therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even or at midnight, or at cock crowing or in the morning, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

Finally, how inestimable is that holy faith which inspires us with the exalted and bléssed hopes whereon we have been meditating to-day! What a support amid the toils; what a refuge from ~~life's~~ storms! What a powerful and constraining motive to the most magnanimous sacrifices, to the most beneficent and God-like deeds! Oh, that we may ever hold fast to this glorious

* In hoc stans delibera.



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hope; that we may wholly surrender ourselves to its purifying influences; that we may abundantly experience its blessed efficacy; that we may finally attain to its *enrapturing consummation!*